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Charleston Celebrates Leap Year by Activating Free Wi-Fi Network at Marion Square

Announcement made leading up to the BB&T Charleston Wine + Food Festival

CHARLESTON, S.C. -- February 29, 2012 -- Marion Square - one of Charleston's premier public gathering places for events including the Charleston Farmers Market, BB&T Charleston Wine + Food Festival and Spoleto Festival USA - is the city's first park to have free public Wi-Fi access funded by a Google grant to the Charleston Digital Corridor Foundation.

"With the proliferation of computers and mobile devices, people are increasingly looking to stay connected to information and their social networks while they enjoy the outdoors," said Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr. "I am pleased to announce - made possible by a grant from Google - the City of Charleston's Wi-Fi initiative."

"Our on-the-go lives often require us to use our smartphones to access the Internet to do everything from making dinner reservations to finding a place to park," said Eric Wages, operations manager for the Google data center in Berkeley County. "The Charleston Free Wi-Fi program is another example of how Google supports initiatives that we are passionate about such as technology literacy and innovation, renewable energy innovation, access to high speed Internet and new economy entrepreneurship."

According to the Office of Tourism Analysis at the College of Charleston, the total impact of tourism based on the most recent figures is just over \$3 billion with activities in Marion Square, including the BB&T Wine + Food Festival and Southeastern Wildlife Exposition contributing to this impact.

"Increasingly, our visitors utilize smartphones and other digital devices while enjoying their visit to the Charleston area," said Helen Hill, executive director of the Charleston

Area Convention & Visitors Bureau. "Having Wi-Fi available in the heart of historic downtown Charleston, particularly at the site of so many special events, is something they are sure to appreciate."

The BB&T Charleston Wine + Food Festival, which takes place from March 1st to 4th, is one of the city's signature cultural events that attracts more than 19,000 food and wine connoisseurs from across the country visiting Charleston and mainly Marion Square. The free Wi-Fi access will provide event officials and attendees with a much-needed tool to enhance their experience.

"This is a great day not only for the BB&T Charleston Wine + Food Festival, but Charleston," said Charleston Wine + Food Event Manager Randi Weinstein. "After six challenging years of piecemealing various providers together to access Wi-Fi during our festival, we finally have a permanent solution that allows for a smooth, seamless use internally while enabling our guests to stay in the loop regarding events and ticket availability. The Wi-Fi will also give our more than 90 vendors the ease of selling their products without having to hard wire a network, in turn saving them hundreds of dollars in set-up fees and dedicated phone lines."

Marion Square, named for military leader Francis Marion, was originally a parade ground for the State Arsenal and then a green for The Citadel. The park is located in the heart of downtown Charleston between King and Meeting streets and is a favorite park of the College of Charleston's students.

"King Street and Charleston Peninsula businesses celebrate the significance of Google's gift of Wi-Fi to Marion Square," said Susan Lucas, president of the King Street Marketing Group, a collaborative business marketing and economic development program for the Charleston Peninsula. "This establishes a cornerstone in the peninsula's growing Wi-Fi presence and will be exceptionally valuable when businesses partner with events like SEWE, the Cooper River Bridge Run, Charleston Fashion Week, BB&T Wine + Food Festival and Spoleto Festival USA."

When a visitor to Marion Square connects to their Wi-Fi, their browser will take them to a landing page, where they will see instructions and terms of service to access the Wi-Fi network. Businesses adjacent to Marion Square will also receive window decals and other information handouts to let visitors know that they're in a free Wi-Fi zone.

Funding for the Charleston Free Wi-Fi Network was made possible through a \$47,000 Google grant for the project's capital costs and maintenance of the network for three years. The Charleston Free Wi-Fi Network will be owned and operated by the Charleston Digital Corridor Foundation, an entity that supports the City's mission to attract, nurture and promote Charleston's knowledge economy.

For more information about the Charleston Free Wi-Fi Network, please visit CharlestonFreeWiFi.com.

For more information about Google, please visit www.google.com/berkeleycounty.

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